
Chapter 2: Interagency Process

The purpose of the planning process described in this handbook is to create a system by which the interagency can effectively integrate the operations of all USG actors in a complex contingency operation. Although the day-to-day interagency process is generally effective in producing coordinated policy options and decisions, the process requires additional coordinating mechanisms and planning tools to cope with the demands of providing coordinated guidance for operations in response to a complex emergency.

Prior to integrated pol-mil planning, the interagency provided only general guidance to USG agencies involved in operations on the ground. This situation often resulted in U.S. agencies differently interpreting the overall mission and objectives. In addition, each agency developed and attempted to execute its own approach to an operation in relative isolation. For example, although military forces always have a detailed plan before deploying, Department of Defense (DoD) often did its planning in isolation, without allowing other agencies any insight into planned military operations. As a result of this isolation, actions in the field lacked coordination, resource issues were not adequately addressed, and major elements of the mission were often misunderstood until well after the operation was underway.

While integrated pol-mil planning does not guarantee success in a complex contingency operation, it does increase the likelihood of success by ensuring that:

- various U.S. agencies plan operations using the same purpose, mission and objectives
- all aspects of the operation are coordinated at the policy level
- key issues and requirements are identified and addressed early on in the planning process
- interagency planning process clearly assigns responsibility for distinct elements of an operation to specific senior administration officials
- critical decisions about priorities and allocation of resources are made early on

The Interagency Process

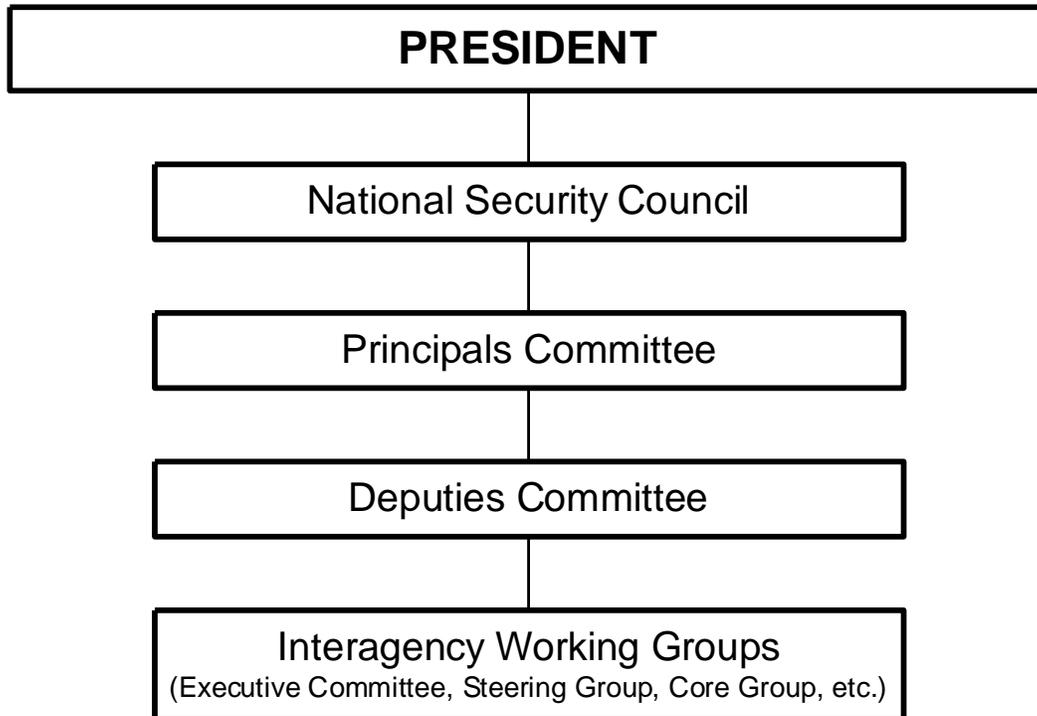
The interagency is not a formal structure but rather the established process for coordinating executive branch decisionmaking when issues involve multiple agencies of the government. Each major issue area has different sets of actors and different sets of formal and informal guidelines that govern interagency activities.

The most senior interagency organization is the National Security Council (NSC) and it includes four statutory members: the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Director of Central Intelligence serve as advisors to the Council. In practice, each administration has chosen to include additional cabinet-level officials to participate in NSC deliberations in response to the President's expressed need for policy advice on national security affairs.

Under The National Security Act of 1947, the National Security Council administers the interagency process for national security matters. It emphasizes the need for integration of agency policy to improve overall effectiveness of national security decision-making:

The function of the Council shall be to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security.

Reporting to the Council is a number of subordinate committees. Although each administration adjusts these structures as it sees fit, the structure described below has been fairly consistent through a number of administrations and will likely be similar to any structure put in place in the future. In the Clinton Administration, Presidential Decision Directive-2 set the structure of the groups that report to the Council as follows:



- *Principals Committee* (cabinet-level representatives): The senior interagency forum for considering national security issues.
- *Deputies Committee* (deputy/under secretary-level): The senior sub-cabinet group tasked with monitoring the work of the interagency process and identifying unresolved policy issues for the Principals Committee. The Deputies Committee is also responsible, in conjunction with sub-groups it may establish, for crisis management.
- *Interagency Working Groups* (assistant /deputy assistant secretary-level): Normally established by the Deputies Committee, there are a number of Interagency Working Groups -- some permanent, others ad hoc -- using various names: Executive Committee, Steering Group, or Core Group. These interagency working groups meet regularly to assess policy areas or crisis situations, build consensus for USG action, frame policy issues for decision, and assume accountability for proper implementation of decisions.

Functions of the Interagency Process

Regardless of how an administration may choose to structure its NSC, the role of the interagency in the day-to-day management of national security issues remains fairly similar. The NSC-led interagency process:

- identifies policy issues and questions
- formulates options
- raises issues to the appropriate level for decision within the NSC structure
- makes decisions where appropriate
- oversees the implementation of policy decisions

The process involves extensive coordination within and among the agencies of the executive branch. The benefit of the process is that it is thorough and inclusive--each organization brings its own practices and skills to the interagency process. The drawback is that it can also be slow and cumbersome--each agency also brings its own culture, philosophy and bureaucratic interests.

For the majority of interagency managed policy issues, the benefits of involving all appropriate actors in the decisionmaking process outweigh the inefficiencies. However, when the interagency has to manage the USG response to a crisis, the inefficiencies inherent in the normal workings of the interagency process can be crippling.

There are three characteristics of crisis management that distinguish it from the normal policy making process. First, the amount of time available for deliberation is comparatively short. Therefore, the interagency must have well-established procedures for producing timely policy direction. Second, decisions concerning the response to a complex emergency must be not only coordinated in Washington, but also, unlike most situations, coordinated and implemented in an integrated manner in the field. Consequently, the Washington interagency must not only decide policy direction, but also do the initial planning for the implementation of those decisions. Third, complex emergencies often involve agencies within the USG that are not normally part of the national security policy making structure. Any crisis procedures must not only include these agencies, but also ensure that their perspectives are adequately integrated into the overall USG response.

The planning process described below emerged from the experience of the past few years, but was developed and first implemented fully during the planning and execution of Restore Democracy in Haiti. Haiti provided an excellent test case for this type of integrated planning because: 1) most of the people involved in planning the intervention in Haiti had been involved in planning a previous complex contingency operation; and 2) there was enough time prior to executing the operation to develop new planning tools and apply lessons learned from past operations.

Interagency Planning During a Crisis

When a complex emergency presents itself, the process begins with the interagency meeting in its usual structure. Information about the potential crisis, specifically an assessment of the situation to include ongoing U.S. actions, is provided to Interagency

Working Groups generally by Assistant Secretary-level representatives of the appropriate agencies. Issues are then framed for discussion in the Deputies Committee. The Deputies Committee further refines the issues and prepares policy options for the Principals Committee. The Principals Committee then recommends appropriate action to the President. Although in some cases individuals may do initial planning for a complex contingency operation, official interagency planning does not begin until the Deputies authorize it. After authorization, the NSC charters the Executive Committee (ExComm), subordinate to the Deputies Committee, and integrated interagency planning begins in earnest. Developing coordinated, strategic guidance for a crisis operation requires adding mechanisms between the decision-making authorities at the Deputies level and the agencies tasked to execute the operation.

The ExComm oversees the integrated pol-mil planning and implementation procedures outlined in this handbook. The first task of the ExComm is to begin developing the pol-mil plan. The pol-mil plan forces the interagency to discuss and agree on the critical elements of the operation, including the mission, objectives and desired endstate. The plan also articulates an overall concept of operations for U.S. participation. Pol-mil planning is not a substitute for the efforts of individual agencies. Rather, it is a mechanism for harmonizing agency plans and actions. It should be used whenever the resources of multiple U.S. agencies are called upon to support U.S. objectives in a complex contingency operation.

The assistant secretary-level members of the ExComm serve as “program managers” and use the overall guidance in the pol-mil plan to develop assigned mission area plans. The ExComm reviews these specific plans prior to the interagency rehearsal. Comments and guidance from the review are incorporated into the full draft of the pol-mil plan.

The Deputies Committee at the interagency rehearsal then reviews the complete pol-mil plan, with all of its component mission area plans. The objective of the rehearsal is to synchronize the individual mission area plans. After the rehearsal, the assistant secretary-level program managers revise their mission area plans as necessary, and the ExComm incorporates them into the final pol-mil plan.

As a result of this process, the interagency provides the President with a coherent strategy for his final approval and the interagency is able to transmit coordinated guidance to those tasked to conduct the operations.

After the ExComm promulgates the strategic-level guidance for the operation, the initial planning works of the Washington interagency is completed and focus shifts to the operational and tactical levels. Once the operation begins, the ExComm must monitor the operation's execution and continuously reassess the situation on the ground. The ExComm can recommend modifications to the strategy and implement changes as they are approved. This is especially important during the transition between phases of the

operation and in preparing for the hand-off to either a follow-on operation or the host nation. This monitoring function is critical whether the operation appears to be going well or not. When lives of U.S. citizens are at risk and significant U.S. interests are involved, the interagency must provide vigilant oversight.

The ExComm is also responsible for conducting the after-action review, which analyzes the operation and distills lessons learned for future operations. This allows those planning for future operations to benefit from past USG experiences.